

## Have a Heart to Eat Healthier

In celebration of Valentine's Day, one of the national health observances this month includes Heart Healthy Month. As the leading killer, heart disease and stroke (the third leading cause of death in the U.S.) are the most common cardiovascular diseases. 40% of all annual deaths in men and women are caused by cardiovascular disease. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 910,000 Americans die of cardiovascular diseases each year, which is 1 death every 35 seconds. Although these largely preventable conditions are more common among people aged 65 or older, the number of sudden deaths from heart disease among people aged 15–34 has increased.

While Naval Special Warfare emphasizes the importance of physical fitness, regular dietary habits are just as important to remain fit operationally. There have been several members of NSW discovering that they are at risk for heart disease and reminded that PT is not the only necessary component to stay fit and healthy. Many of our members have abnormal lipids (cholesterol) that may be life threatening if dietary changes are not made. It is important to remember when cholesterol tests are taken that numbers from total cholesterol, low-density lipoproteins (LDL's), high-density lipoproteins (HDL's) and triglycerides are within normal levels. High consumption of saturated fats is the leading cause of elevated cholesterol.

The following heart healthy diet tips can help maintain heart health and assist in preventing cardiovascular disease.

- Vegetables and fruits are high in vitamins, minerals and fiber — and they're low in calories. Eating a variety of fruits and vegetables may help you control your weight and your blood pressure.
- Unrefined whole-grain foods contain fiber that can help lower your blood cholesterol and help you feel full, which may help you manage your weight.
- Eat fish at least twice a week. Recent research shows that eating oily fish containing omega-3 fatty acids (for example, salmon, trout, and herring) may help lower your risk of death from coronary artery disease.
- Choose lean meats and poultry without skin and prepare them without added saturated and trans fat.
- Select fat-free, 1 percent fat, and low-fat dairy products.
- Cut back on foods containing partially hydrogenated vegetable oils to reduce trans fat in your diet.
- Cut back on foods high in dietary cholesterol. Aim to eat less than 300 milligrams of cholesterol each day.
- Cut back on beverages and foods with added sugars.
- Choose and prepare foods with little or no salt. Aim to eat less than 2,300 milligrams of sodium per day.
- If you drink alcohol, drink in moderation. That means one drink per day if you're a woman and two drinks per day if you're a man.
- Follow the American Heart Association recommendations when you eat out, and keep an eye on your portion sizes.

According to the recent literature, a 12- to 13-point reduction in blood pressure can reduce heart attacks by 21%, strokes by 37% and all deaths from cardiovascular disease by 25%. A 10% decrease in total blood cholesterol levels may reduce the incidence of coronary heart disease by as much as 30%. To learn more about eating right for the health of your heart, contact the following resources: American Heart Association at [www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org), National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute at [www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov) and the American Dietetic Association at [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org) .